

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE**

Neither for Nor Against L.D. 163

**An Act To Increase the Number of Rafting Passengers Allowed for
Licensed Outfitters on Unallocated Rivers**

SPONSORED BY: Senator SAVIELLO of Franklin

Good afternoon Senator Dutremble, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Colonel Joel Wilkinson of the Maine Warden Service and I will be representing the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife today and testifying neither for nor against **L.D. 163**.

L.D. 163 would increase the number of rafting passengers allowed on unallocated rapidly flowing rivers for licensed outfitters from 92 passengers per day to 120 passengers per day. The department would like to provide you with a basic understanding of this topic so that you can be fully informed in making this policy related decision. Our hope is that our testimony will better inform you of current definitions as it relates to commercial use on Maine's rapidly flowing rivers and ultimately allow you to analyze the potential benefits and possible conflicts that could occur as a result of this bill.

Allocation:

A privilege provided by the state for a commercial outfitter to take passengers down the river on an allocated day. No commercial outfitter can take passengers down any of the allocated rivers (Kennebec and Penobscot) on allocated days without allocations. Allocations are awarded by bid through the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and evaluated every 5 years. During the commercial whitewater season of 2012, we had **27** licensed outfitters and of those outfitters, **18** possess allocations that would allow them to run commercially on allocated days.

Allocated Days:

Kennebec- All Saturdays from July 1st through August 31st are allocated with a maximum of 1,000 commercial passengers. **13** outfitters possess Kennebec River allocations to run on those days.

Penobscot- All Saturdays from July 1st through August 31st are allocated. The river is also allocated on Sunday's on the second, third and fourth Sunday of July and on the first, second, third and fourth Sunday in August with a maximum of 560 commercial

passengers per day. The additional allocated days were a result of reaching maximum use limits on those additional Sundays. **8** outfitters possess Penobscot River allocations on Saturday and **8** outfitters possess Penobscot River allocations on Sunday.

Unallocated Days:

All other days on any of the rapidly flowing rivers are not allocated. The maximum number of commercial passengers per outfitter is 92. This bill aims to increase this number to 120 passengers per day.

The total maximum use on the Kennebec River on those days for all commercial outfitters is 1,000 passengers. The total maximum use on the Penobscot River on those days for all commercial outfitters is 560 passengers.

If an unallocated day reaches maximum use limits the department is directed by statute to allocate additional days.

Maximum use limits were established and are necessary to minimize any detrimental impacts and maintain a quality wilderness experience for all users. These users include those engaged in rafting, fishing, camping and canoeing.

The department understands that these additional opportunities could increase the number of passengers for outfitters therefore maximizing their business opportunities on unallocated days. The department also understands that if all outfitters increase their passenger list by 28 it could result in a maximum increase of 756 per day. Although rafting numbers do not support this trend fully, any substantial increase could result in additional allocated days on these rivers.

Regardless of the policy decision made by the committee, the department does feel that maximum use limits are essential in maintaining an orderly and quality wilderness experience for all users of these rapidly flowing rivers. These limits ensure that not only rafters, but fishermen, kayakers, canoeists and campers can enjoy the rivers as well.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.